



**CONSUMER
& INDUSTRY
SERVICES**

*"Serving Michigan...
Serving You"*

e-DISCUSSIONS

VOLUME 30 - February/March 2003

From the Director

by David C. Hollister

It's been an exciting six weeks on the job as director of the Michigan Department of Consumer & Industry Services. I've had countless meetings with labor and business groups, legislators, college and university leaders, and associations across the state - all of whom are committed to a partnership to promoting urban development and economic growth in Michigan. I've also been meeting with an essential element of this partnership: our employees. As you know, CIS will soon be joining with the Michigan Department of Career Development, Michigan Economic Development Corporation, and Michigan Broadband Development Authority so I have had the privilege of meeting literally hundreds of our hard-working team members one-on-one to answer questions and get to know you on a first name basis.

My philosophy as an elected official was to maintain an "open door" policy in my office where citizens and employees were welcome to visit. This philosophy hasn't changed now that I am a department director, and I believe as a public servant my office is in fact the "people's office" since we are here to serve the citizens of Michigan. In fact, many of you who attended the Williams Building reception accepted my invitation to tour the Executive Office on the 4th Floor. For those of you who have been unable to attend any of the Lansing area "Meet the Director" receptions, I can only emphasize that there will be many future opportunities scheduled in Detroit and across Michigan.

I do want you to know I am always receptive to your ideas on how we can better serve our customers. When Gov. Jennifer Granholm recently unveiled her FY'04 state budget, it put into perspective the need for ALL state employees to be creative to accomplish more with less. The

Governor's budget was an inclusive process as you know since your input in response to my recent e-mail request to all employees helped prioritize department functions. Thank you to all of you who responded to this request and worked closely with your bureau and office directors to prepare the information, which was so valuable to our team in planning for FY'04.

I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome the recent additions to our Executive Office: Deputy Director Bob Swanson, his Secretary Teri Cook, and my Assistant Robert Johnson. Also, Linda Herrmann, formerly of the Bureau of Commercial Services, has done such a great job during that transition that she will continue to serve as Secretary to Deputy Director Dennis Sykes. Thank you for making all of us feel so welcome!



David C. Hollister

MAYOR'S COMMENT BOX

I welcome your ideas, comments, suggestions & questions!

Send your feedback to:

mediainfo@michigan.gov.

I will respond to selected questions/comments in future newsletters.

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D. C. Hollister

Meet Your Director - Lansing Reception



Above, Michigan Employment Security Board of Review Chairperson Kathleen Markman meets department director, Mayor David C. Hollister. At right, Jill Murphy (right) of Michigan Economic Development Corporation meets Deputy Director Bob Swanson and his secretary, Teri Cook.



Above, Barb Parks of the Michigan Department of Career Development meets with Bob Johnson, assistant to Mayor Hollister. At right, Ric Benson of the CIS Bureau of Health Systems meets Mayor Hollister.

300 Attend Downtown Lansing Reception

More than 300 people attended the Downtown Lansing Reception on March 10 in the Williams Building Lobby to meet the new department director, Mayor David C. Hollister.

Three receptions were scheduled in the Lansing area for all CIS, Michigan Economic Development Corporation, Career Development, and Broadband Development Authority employees.

Photos from the Secondary Complex Reception on March 13 and Okemos Reception on March 19 will be in the next newsletter.

Reception dates for Detroit and other locations will be announced in the future.





Above, Angela Johnson of the Michigan Department of Career Development (right) shakes hands with Deputy Director Dennis Sykes as Secretary Linda Herrmann looks on. At above right, Mayor Hollister's assistant Bob Johnson greets Dick Lavolette (right) of the Office of Financial and Insurance Services.



Above, Mayor Hollister meets Erica Nakfoor(left) and Verna Moore(right) of the Michigan Department of Career Development. At left, Renee Ozburn of the CIS Bureau of Hearings chats with Mayor Hollister at the reception.





New Constituent Services Office Opened

In a symbolic “red-tape” ribbon cutting, Governor Jennifer M. Granholm opened the doors on Feb. 6th of her office to the public. The Constituent Services Division of the Executive Office is now located in newly configured office space on the Romney Building’s ground floor.

Governor Granholm also announced in her State of the State Address that constituents can meet with her to discuss a policy issue, idea, or problem during monthly constituent office hours. Office hours will be held on the last Thursday of each month during the evening. Those interested in constituent hours should contact Constituent Services for further information on requesting an appointment.

Constituents who would like to speak to a specialist for assistance should visit the Constituent Services Division during regular business hours: 9 am to 5 pm, Monday through Friday, or contact the office by calling (517) 335-7858. E-mail correspondence that does not require a response may be sent through the State of Michigan Website: <http://www.michigan.gov>.



Gov. Granholm cuts the ribbon for the Constituent Services Office now located on the Romney Building ground floor.

Employee Service Program Spotlights Alcohol Awareness Month

April is National Alcohol Awareness Month. National Alcohol Screening Day, falling on April 10 this year, is the centerpiece of the Alcohol Awareness Month campaign.

Most individuals who consume alcohol do so safely and do not encounter difficulties. However, according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), approximately 14 million people drink in amounts that do create problems.

But what is a safe level of drinking? The answer is not the same for everyone. For most adults, the NIAAA considers two drinks per day for men and one drink per day for women as moderate drinking that causes few if any problems (“one drink” is defined as 12 oz. of beer, 5 oz. of wine or 1.5 oz. of 80-proof distilled spirits). However, certain health conditions, a family history of alcohol problems, pregnancy, or the use of either prescription or over-the-counter medications may make even moderate drinking harmful. What about you? Is it OK for you to have one drink? What about two or three? Are there special circumstances that you should be aware of, as you consider your use of alcohol? If you have these or other questions, the State of Michigan Employee Service Program offers a free, anonymous telephone alcohol screening that is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. By calling 1-800-887-5676, you will be able to respond to a series of pre-recorded questions and have your answers tabulated, while you are still on the phone. Perhaps Alcohol Awareness Month is the right time for you to make a call for your good health.

Further information can be obtained by calling the Employee Service Program at 517-373-7630/800-521-1377 in Lansing, or 313-456-4020/800-872-5563 in Detroit.

CIS Help Desk to Consolidate with the Department of Information Technology

CIS help desk staff members are relocating to the Grand Tower on March 14 to join other Department of Information Technology (DIT) help desk staff. They will use REMEDY call tracking software to log in the call, and assign to a team to fix. The software allows DIT to make sure the help desk call is being responded to in a timely manner, and, enable help desk staff to send status e-mails to the customer. **IMPORTANT: The new help desk phone number is: 517.241.9700.**



Bureau of Safety & Regulation

New Asbestos Website Reduces Costs & Protects Workers

The Bureau of Safety & Regulation Asbestos Program's web page, located at <http://www.michigan.gov/asbestos>, has added the "Verify and Search" data base research function to better serve the public and the asbestos industry. This function will offer employers the opportunity to make a good-faith effort to hire properly trained, qualified employees. The website enhancement will save employers valuable time since they previously had to call or visit the office to obtain the information.

CIS Director David C. Hollister said, "This unique research function will allow businesses to immediately verify asbestos contractor information. We will be able to serve the public better and protect workers, with significantly reduced costs."

The Asbestos Program's primary function is to ensure that people working with asbestos are properly trained and that individuals performing asbestos removal comply with rules governing the work activity. These rules are designed to protect not only the individual employee performing asbestos abatement work, but also the general public that occupies the areas or buildings where the work occurs. The asbestos website can now be used to search for individual contractor and worker information. The user will be able to immediately identify: Contractor license information, Worker accreditation information, Training sponsor information, Training course information, and Abatement project notification information.

Since the site will allow contractors an easy means to verify and hire trained and accredited employees, they can potentially avoid violations and fines and conduct better quality abatement projects. This new information will also help Asbestos compliance investigators in the field to immediately verify contractor and employee information. The site can also be used to look up information on whether an asbestos abatement project is scheduled.

This new interactive function will dramatically reduce clerical workload, while providing immediate access to information. There will also be a significant reduction in formal FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) requests because the desired information is readily available.

For more information on the Asbestos Program, please call 517-322-1320 or visit the website at: <http://www.michigan.gov/asbestos>.

At right, the asbestos website can now be used to search for contractor license, worker accreditation, training sponsor, training course, and abatement project notification information.

Michigan.gov Home | [CIS Home](#) | [CIS Sitemap](#) | [Contact CIS](#) | [Online Services](#) | [CIS Agencies](#) | Search

MICHIGAN ASBESTOS PROGRAM - Verify and Search

[Home](#) | [Individual](#) | [Contractor](#) | [Project Notification](#) | [Training Course Provider](#) | [Scheduled Asbestos Training Course](#)

Contractor Name	License Type	City	State
AFFORDABLE ASBESTOS TECHNOLOGIES, INC.	Type I (1 - 4 employees)	DETROIT	MI
ASBESTOS & LEAD ABATEMENT OF MICHIGAN, INC.	Type II (5 + employees)	JACKSON	MI
ASBESTOS ABATEMENT INC.	Type II (5 + employees)	LANSING	MI
ASBESTOS ABATEMENT, INC.	Type II (5 + employees)	LANSING	MI
ASBESTOS CONTROL ENVIRONMENTAL, INC.	Type II (5 + employees)	TAYLOR	MI
ASBESTOS CONTROL, INC.	Type I (1 - 4 employees)	ARLINGTON HEIGHTS	IL
ASBESTOS DEMOLITION SERVICES, INC.	Type II (5 + employees)	BENZONIA	MI
ASBESTOS HANDLERS, INCORPORATED	Type II (5 + employees)	TULSA	OK
ASBESTOS REMOVAL TECHNOLOGIES, INC.	Type II (5 + employees)	SOUTHFIELD	MI
ASBESTOS REMOVAL, INC.	Type I (1 - 4 employees)	GREEN BAY	WI

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Total Records Found 17

NEW SEARCH



MSHDA Interest Rate Drops to New Record Low of 4.875%

Interest rates have hit an unprecedented low on home mortgages offered by the Michigan State Housing Development Authority, Governor Jennifer Granholm announced today. The 30-day offer will give low- and moderate-income residents more time to take advantage of the opportunity to realize the American dream of homeownership.

Beginning March 17, MSHDA will finance 30-year, fixed rate loans to modest-income homebuyers at an interest rate of 4.875 percent, with no discount points charged at loan closing. The rate will be available through April 17



and prospective homebuyers can fill out a pre-qualification application on MSHDA's website, <http://www.michigan.gov/mshda>. For more information, prospective homebuyers may call 1-800/327-9158.

Just last month, the Authority announced a 30-day extension on its 5.25% rate, at that time the lowest rate in the program's history.

"Through this program, more hard-working families in Michigan will be able to realize their dream of homeownership," Granholm said. "I'm delighted that the Authority is able to offer such a remarkable opportunity for homebuyers. Safe, affordable housing for all Michigan families is a top priority for our administration, and I commend MSHDA on making homeownership an affordable reality for many of our families." According to MSHDA Executive Director James L. Logue III, homebuyers with household incomes up to \$56,650 in metropolitan counties and \$44,000 in rural counties may qualify for the 30-year loans to buy new or existing homes. First-time homebuyers with incomes of 80 percent of county median or less (adjustable for family size) also may qualify for down payment assistance - up to \$10,000 for families with children and up to \$5,000 for families without children.

"We recognize that many homebuyers can afford mortgage payments but have limited resources for the down payment needed to buy a home," Logue said. "By offering this assistance, we can help families who otherwise might be shut out of the market."

Buyers who receive down payment assistance may purchase a home costing up to \$90,000, except where lower under federal law. For other buyers in MSHDA's program, existing homes may cost up to \$105,000 and new houses up to \$128,000, depending on the location of the property.

Compared to conventional interest rates of 6.0 percent, MSHDA financing will save the buyer on a \$70,000 loan approximately \$33 per month.

Available for certain loan types, homebuyers also may choose MSHDA's optional "step" loan, which features a reduced interest rate of 4.75 percent for the first three years, and then is increased to 5.75 percent for years 4-30. Borrowers will be qualified for the payment at the initial rate; the increase in payment at the fourth year is modest, according to Logue.

The program is primarily for first-time homebuyers, but many localities in Michigan are exempt from this federal restriction. MSHDA does not refinance existing mortgages or land contracts. Because the federal government considers bond-financed mortgages to be subsidized, borrowers may be subject to federal "recapture tax" if they sell their home within nine years and realize a gain on the sale, Logue said.

Applications for MSHDA loans are taken by approximately 115 branch offices of lending institutions participating in the MSHDA program. MSHDA raises funds to finance home mortgages through the sale of mortgage revenue bonds to private investors; no state tax dollars are used. To date, the agency has financed nearly 51,500 home purchases in the Single Family program, for an investment of \$2.2 billion.



Jones Named OFIS Acting Commissioner

Governor Jennifer M. Granholm named Ronald C. Jones as Acting Commissioner of the Office of Financial and Insurance Services (OFIS) on Feb. 26 following the recent resignation of Commissioner Frank M. Fitzgerald.

Jones was appointed OFIS Chief Deputy Commissioner in April 2000 and currently oversees the Office of Financial Evaluation. Previously, he served the Corporation, Securities and Land Development Bureau in several capacities. Jones, of Haslett, graduated cum laude from Thomas M. Cooley Law School and is an adjunct professor at the Detroit College of Law.

"Ronald has been a dedicated public servant for 17 years," said Granholm. "His skill and knowledge of OFIS will ensure a smooth bridge between the prior commissioner and a new, permanent commissioner I will appoint soon." Governor Granholm will appoint a permanent OFIS commissioner in the upcoming weeks. "I look forward to naming a commissioner who shares the people's priorities and who will balance consumer protection with fair industry regulation," she said.



RONALD C. JONES

OFIS Protects Consumers Regarding Credit Scoring Activity

The Michigan Office of Financial and Insurance Services (OFIS) recently issued Bulletin 2003-01-INS, which requires insurance companies to provide consumers with more information about the use of credit to calculate insurance rates. Michigan insurance companies must begin implementing the changes on July 1, 2003 and complete actuarial justification by June 30, 2004.

Insurance companies doing business in Michigan that establish consumer credit scores to set insurance rates will have to recalculate scores annually or when a consumer corrects their credit history, provide detailed information about the company's use of credit, and justify the company's use of credit scoring.

The OFIS report on insurance credit scoring is available at <http://www.michigan.gov/ofis> by following the credit scoring graphic at the bottom of the page or typing in the key words 'credit scoring.' OFIS complaint information is available at <http://www.michigan.gov/ofis> by following the consumer services link at the top left of the page. All OFIS information is also available by calling OFIS toll free at 877-999-6442.

OFIS Launches On Line Insurance License Application

Michigan Office of Financial and Insurance Services (OFIS) expanded its e-government presence today by launching its first automated on line form on Feb. 11. The form makes it more convenient for those applying for a license to act as an insurance agent in Michigan.

In 2002, OFIS processed 26,870 insurance agent license applications, which were entered manually. The new on line form will capture needed information and eliminate the data entry process. OFIS also regulates 47,779 resident and 54,987 non-resident insurance agents as of December 31, 2002.

The Michigan On Line Application for Individual License (FIS 0225) can found on the OFIS web site at: <http://www.michigan.gov/ofis> and combines the previous resident and non-resident applications. After users complete the form they will be asked to submit it electronically. Once submitted a confirmation number will be issued, confirming that the form has been received by OFIS.



CIS Salutes is devoted to employee accomplishments (on and off the job), letters of appreciation and staff changes. Please send CIS Salutes news to: [Lori Donlan - ldonla@michigan.gov](mailto:Lori.Donlan@michigan.gov).

CIS Celebrities Featured in the News

Two CIS employees were featured in Lansing publications for their off-the-job talents:

Norene Lind of the Office of Policy and Legislative Affairs was featured in the Lansing State Journal on Feb. 25 for her efforts to pick up litter in her neighborhood. The article, entitled "Woman Walks Westside Roads Removing Litter," stated that neighbors were appreciative of her efforts. According to the article, Ingham County Commissioner Chris Swope, a neighbor, said "Any time you clean up the neighborhood to any degree, it improves people's perception of the neighborhood. What she's doing helps keep property values up and promotes neighborhood esteem." Good job Norene!

James Harris, student assistant with the Asbestos Program, was on the Jan. 22 cover of NOISE Magazine strumming a guitar. It appears that not only is James a superb student in the medical field (making the Dean's list last semester), an avid worker with the Occupational Health Division, a plant doctor with quite a green thumb, and a pottery sculptor, but in his spare time he plays at the open mic as a regular at the Creole Gallery in Old Town. With James, every performance is just as exciting as the last. He also has a comic routine that goes along with

his music; when he takes the stage, the humor comes with him. Harris says, "Playing music is a good time... a stress reliever, kind of."

U.P. Safety Conference Featuring MIOSHA Reps a Success

More than 230 professionals from across the Upper Peninsula gathered Jan. 30, at Bay College in Escanaba for the Third Annual Upper Peninsula Safety Conference.

A highlight of the event was the presentation made by Keynote Speaker **Doug Kalinowski**, Bureau of Safety & Regulation Director, who covered the successes of the MIOSHA five-year strategic plan, and MIOSHA's commitment to work together with employers and employees to continue to "make a difference" in workers' lives. Participants took pleasure in Kalinowski's handwritten poem about his trip to the Upper Peninsula.

Presenters included safety and health professionals from a wide range of organizations. MIOSHA had a large contingent at the event. In addition to Kalinowski's speech, CET Consultants **Dan Maki**, **Doug Kimmel**, and **Jenelle Thelen** provided training sessions. CET Consultants **Jenelle Thelen** and **Bob Dayringer** provided a pre-conference full-day seminar on air contaminants and noise.

The conference focused on such issues as: National Electrical Safety Code (NESC); Indoor Microbial Contamination; the Michigan Voluntary Protection Programs (MVPP); Chainsaw Safety; Crane Inspections/Heavy Equipment; MIOSHA Required Written Programs; Productive Safety Meetings; Preventative Body Maintenance; and more.

CET Employees Receive Letters of Appreciation

Tom Swindlehurst of the Bureau of Safety & Regulation Consultation Education and Training (CET) Division recently conducted a 10-Hour Construction Safety Course for Granger Construction Company. Richard Dandurand, Granger's Continuous Learning Director wrote, "Our people rated your last presentation as outstanding. They were very enthusiastic about the training."

CET Division Onsite Safety Consultant **Howard Simmons** received a thank you letter from Malcolm Cain, Safety Manager of Fapco, Inc., for his timely and comprehensive review of Fapco's facility. "We appreciate your help in maintaining and improving the safety of our employees. Your professionalism and attention to detail are a credit to your department," said Cain.

CET Safety Consultant **Richard Zdeb** received a letter of



thanks from Carmen Ceja-Blohm, Program Chair for the Valley Society of Human Resource Managers, for his "The Top 25 MIOSHA Violations" presentation to their members. Ms. Ceja-Blohm said, "Our members found his presentation informative and worth the time from their busy schedules."

CET Consultant **Dan Maki** was recently complimented on the safety training he did for the Department of Corrections Camp Ojibway Sawmill in mid-December. According to Jay Ketcik, Operations Manager for Michigan State Industries, the sawmill superintendent found the training so beneficial that he did not want it to go unnoticed. Even the rigors of winter in the Upper Peninsula cannot keep our stalwart consultants from making their appointed rounds promoting safety for Michigan workers!

OFIS Employees Receive Kudos from Constituents

Marlene Bukoski of the Office of Financial and Insurance Services received a note of appreciation from a constituent who wanted to keep his license "active" but has a medical condition that was preventing him from meeting the 30 hours of approved insurance education credits. Bukoski, who oversees all of the Education procedures associated with insurance licensing, granted and prepared paper work to get the individual's license reinstated. Even though he

will not be able to solicit, sell or negotiate insurance, his license status will allow him to receive his residual commissions. The licensee wrote, "Thank you for your efforts on my behalf today, I had no idea I could do anything about my license while disabled."

Emily DeLaGarza and **Marlene Bukoski** of the Office of Financial & Insurance Services received positive feedback from a constituent, whose refund for an overpayment was processed quickly. "Thank you both so much for all of your help! People like you are quite hard to find these days!" wrote La'Creshea Makonnen.

MIOSHA Staff Changes Announced

The Bureau of Safety & Regulation announces several staff changes:

Vivian Bodiford has been named the new Lead Worker in the Citation Processing Section of the General Industry Safety Division effective Feb. 3. She replaces recent retiree Jan Clark.

Nancy Lampman has been named the new Word Processor E8 (Desktop Publishing Secretary) in the CET Division effective Feb. 3.

Toscha Densmore joined the General Industry Safety Division as a Word Processing Assistant 7 effective Jan. 6. Toscha joins us from the Bureau of Health Services-Application Unit.

Congratulations to **Denise Thelen** on her selection as Department Analyst Trainee position in Bureau of Safety & Regulation Administration.

Three individuals have accepted positions as safety officers with the General Industry Safety Division beginning Feb. 18:

Robert Black will fill the Washtenaw/Wayne county vacancy. Black was a Die Cast Engineering Manager with a firm in the Tool and Die Industry where his duties included employee safety responsibilities. As a Journeyman Die-Cast Die Maker, he has extensive knowledge of metalworking equipment, die repair, die cast machines, cranes, lifting devices, heat treatment, and high tech machining operations.

Alisa Cleveland will fill the Wayne County vacancy. Cleveland was a safety officer with the City of Detroit Public Lighting Department. She implemented safety training and programs, accident prevention, reviewed new equipment for safety specifications and monitored field staff with routine on-site safety surveys.

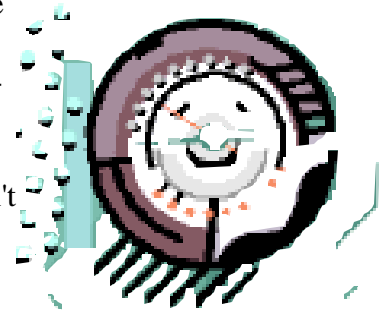
Kevin Thomas will represent the Kalamazoo, St. Joseph, & Branch area. Thomas is currently an Environmental, Health and Safety Manager at a Mid-Michigan stamping facility. His duties include compliance with corporate and regulatory safety, health and environmental mandates, conduct and implement employee safety training programs, and conduct air and noise monitoring.



Governor Applauds Low-Income Energy Assistance Plan

Governor Jennifer Granholm applauded action taken Feb. 5 by the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) to speed up the process for low-income energy assistance grants at a time when cold temperatures have resulted in higher heating bills, leaving many low-income residents facing utility shutoffs. The move will expedite up to \$20 million in grant funds.

"This action recognizes the need for the immediate release of these funds," said Governor Granholm. "We've got six more weeks of winter. We can't afford to make people wait months for help with their bills." Normally, the request for the submission of grant proposals would not take place until the fall of this year."



The MPSC issued an order (Case No. U-13129) requesting that grant proposals be submitted to the Commission on or before February 19. The approved grants: FIA - \$17 million to expand the State Emergency Fund; Salvation Army - \$1 million to serve households statewide ineligible for assistance from FIA or for whom such assistance is insufficient or not available; MCAAA - \$1 million in a direct grant for low-income energy assistance; and THAW - \$1 million for the THAW Safety Net Program.

"Because so many people find themselves in dire circumstances due to Michigan's very cold winter and increases in natural gas prices, it is imperative Michigan's low-income citizens receive immediate help, thus necessitating that we expedite the grant process," noted Commission Chairman Laura Chappelle.

MPSC Requires DTE to File Report on Consecutive Estimated Billing

The Michigan Public Service Commission issued an order on Feb. 5th requiring The Detroit Edison Company and Michigan Consolidated Gas Company (collectively known as DTE) to file a report by March 31 on their use of consecutive estimated bills.

The Commission noted that the problem of consecutive estimated bills continues to be a primary cause of complaint calls to the Commission, despite DTE's earlier commitment to address the issue. "All customers should be able to have confidence that the bills they receive for gas and electric service are based on accurate data," said Commissioner David Svanda. "Estimated bills have caused problems for customers for too long, and it is time to resolve this issue once and for all."

"DTE's failure to meet commitments to close the backlog of consecutive estimated bills warrants additional action," said Commissioner Robert B. Nelson.

Rule 12 of the Commission's Consumer Standards and Billing Practices for Electrical and Gas Residential Service permits a utility to estimate the bill of a residential customer every other billing month. Using this information that it is required to maintain, DTE is required under this order to file a report with the following information for each billing month from January 2002 through and including January 2003:· The number of estimated bills rendered that also had an estimated bill in the prior month;· For each consecutive estimated bill rendered, an identification of the customer, the number of consecutive estimated bills previously rendered, the specific reason that an actual read could not be obtained, and a complete description of the company's efforts to obtain an actual read. The complete description shall include specific dates on which specific actions were taken, the identity of the person taking the action, and all documentation.

In addition, DTE's report is required to provide a narrative description of the program actions taken to comply with its commitments in Case No. U-13287 and an assessment of the success of that program, as well as any relevant plans for future improvements. In Case No. U-13287, the Commission required DTE to file a report on customer service quality issues, and DTE committed to reducing the use of consecutive estimated bills.



Federal Jobless Benefits Continued into 2003

For thousands of jobless Michigan workers, the end of 2002 also signaled the end of their federal unemployment benefits.

The federal Temporary Extended Unemployment Compensation (TEUC) program, which began in March 2002, ended on December 28, leaving thousands of unemployed workers in Michigan and across the country without jobs and without any income. Recognizing the need to help, Congress acted quickly and President Bush signed into law on January 8, 2003, a measure continuing the TEUC program until June 1, 2003.

Michigan's Bureau of Workers' & Unemployment Compensation (BWUC) also acted quickly and immediately began to identify those who had their TEUC benefits cut off in December. By late January and despite its heavy workload of state unemployment claims, the Bureau had identified and mailed applications, certification forms or notices to four different groups of jobless workers who may qualify for TEUC. Among these groups were 52,000 unemployed workers who were still eligible to collect TEUC when the program ended in December.

The Bureau projects that some 75,000 workers will exhaust their state benefits between December 30, 2002, and June 1, 2003, and may potentially qualify for TEUC. Benefit payments through the life of the new extension could total \$336.4 million.

BW&UC Responds to Jobless Workers' Needs

As 2002 drew to a close, the Bureau of Workers' & Unemployment Compensation (BW&UC) was hit hard by the state's early retirement program, losing nearly 40 percent of its unemployment insurance staff. Local offices had skeleton staff levels and the telephone-filed claims process was not ready.

In response, the Bureau implemented a system through which jobless workers could file their unemployment claims by mail. However, a shortage of staff, soon led to a claims backlog. Complicating matters further was the difficulty unemployed workers faced in finding answers to questions about their jobless claims. They were directed to call the Bureau's toll-free telephone customer relations hotline (1-800-638-3995) for help. Unfortunately, the line was inundated with phone calls, and many were unable to get through and were left in the dark about the status of their claims. Claimants soon began calling their legislators and the news media, expressing their frustration with the benefit system.

Shortly, after becoming the Bureau's acting director in January, David Plawecki began working with CIS and BW&UC staff in formulating a plan of action to help jobless workers and to improve the unemployment benefit program. The following steps have been taken to improve customer service:

- **Opening of Walk-In Centers.** The opening of six walk-in help centers across the state where staff give immediate assistance to jobless workers who are having problems with or questions about their unemployment claims. By mid-February, more than 55,400 workers had been helped;
- **Startup of Telephone Filed Claims.** Telephone filed claims began in Northern Michigan for jobless workers filing additional claims;
- **Internet Filed Claims Launched.** Internet filed claims officially began in late January, allowing idled workers to file most new or additional claims online.
- **Hours for the Hotline Expanded.** Staff now field calls from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. In addition, a recorded message greets callers, instead of a busy signal. The message answers many of the most commonly asked questions.
- **Staff Added.** The Bureau received authorization to hire 150 permanent intermittent staff (to help during the extra busy times) and to temporarily retain the services of 87 retired BW&UC employees.



Bureau of Employment Relations

Michigan Labor Relations Agencies to Host National Conference

In late July of 2003, labor relations advocates and agencies in Michigan will have the unique opportunity to showcase our city and state, and the wealth of labor history in our area when we host the Annual Conference of the Association of Labor Relations Agencies (ALRA).

ALRA is a nonprofit organization of some 67 private and public labor relations agencies at the Federal, State, and Provincial levels in the United States and Canada. Every summer, ALRA hosts an annual conference in the locale of a member agency, featuring nationally known speakers and providing member agencies with the opportunity to share information.



The 2003 ALRA Conference will take place from July 26 -30, 2003, at the Marriott Detroit Renaissance Center, and will be hosted by Michigan Employment Relations Commission, Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (U.S. and Canada), National Labor Relations Board, Michigan Civil Service Commission, and the Ontario Provincial Labor Relations Agency.

On Monday, July 28, 2003, there will be an Advocates' Day, and the program will be open to attorneys, arbitrators, labor union representatives, management personnel, mediators, and other labor relations professionals. All of this will occur in our great City of Detroit - the catalyst of the labor movement. Questions concerning ALRA Advocates' Day may be directed to MERC Director Ruthanne Okun at (313) 456-3519.



Energy Office

Grants to Encourage Schools & Municipalities to Use Biodiesel Fuels

The CIS Energy Office has awarded more than \$54,000 in grants to the City of Ann Arbor and five Michigan school districts to demonstrate the use and benefits of biodiesel fuel locally. The recipients and grant amounts are: City of Ann Arbor - \$10,000; Ann Arbor Public Schools - \$10,000; Fowlerville Community Schools - \$7,248; Manchester Community Schools - \$6,830; St. Johns Public Schools - \$10,000; and Zeeland Public Schools - \$10,000.

The projects will include an educational campaign by fleet operators to increase public awareness about the viability of operating school buses and municipal fleets on biodiesel fuel. The grants, which are funded by a federal program, support Michigan's participation in the U.S. Department of Energy Clean Cities program. The Clean Cities Program promotes voluntary alternative fuel use and infrastructure development to help the U.S. achieve energy security and improved air quality with clean burning, domestically produced alternative fuels.

"These grants will encourage school and municipal fleet owners to purchase domestically produced biodiesel fuel and thus accelerate the market demand for this fuel throughout Michigan," Hollister said. "Increasing the use of biodiesel fuel will reduce harmful tailpipe emissions and provide air quality benefits to communities and especially the children and drivers who ride biodiesel fueled school buses."

Biodiesel is a cleaner burning diesel replacement fuel made from natural, renewable sources such as new and used vegetable oils and animal fats. Blends of 20 percent or more biodiesel (mixed with petroleum diesel fuels) can be used in nearly all diesel vehicles with no modifications needed. For more information about the CIS Energy Office, visit: <http://www.michigan.gov/energyoffice>.

